

# MY VOICE<sup>©</sup>

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## NEW HAMPSHIRE GRADES 6-8 RESULTS 2007-2008 ACADEMIC YEAR

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Supported by  
New Hampshire Department of Education's  
*Follow the Child Initiative*

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## **MY VOICE© NEW HAMPSHIRE GRADES 6-8 RESULTS: THE FIRST STEP IN THE *FOLLOW THE CHILD* INITIATIVE**

*The New Hampshire Department of Education, under the leadership of Commissioner Lyonel B. Tracy, is dedicated to providing a personalized education that helps New Hampshire students learn today, graduate tomorrow, and prepare for the future by supporting their personal, social, physical and academic growth. As a result of its commitment to put New Hampshire students at the front and center of its educational system, the New Hampshire Department of Education offered the My Voice© survey free of charge to all schools that wished to participate.*

### **The Role of Student Aspirations in Today's Schools**

When students have high aspirations, *they have the ability to dream about the future, while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.* Whether the goal is to learn Algebra or a trade, get good grades or go to college, students want to be successful. Too often, however, students don't reach their goals and fullest potential because the conditions that inspire and support them are not in place. If students are to enjoy academic, social, and personal success, they must believe in themselves, be actively engaged in their learning, and see the connection between what they learn today and who they want to become tomorrow. When these experiences are absent, aspirations flounder and achievement declines.

In order for students to have and sustain high aspirations, the conditions that enable them to reach their goals must be in place. These conditions are known as the **8 Conditions that Make a Difference®** and are a critical, often overlooked, part of education and school improvement initiatives. The 8 Conditions have been identified and defined by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, an internationally known leader in the study of student aspirations. The 8 Conditions are: *Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action.* In order to measure these conditions in today's schools, the *My Voice©* Student Aspirations Survey was developed.

### **New Hampshire's *Follow the Child* Initiative**

*Follow the Child* helps New Hampshire schools to foster student aspirations and promote student success through an emphasis on personalized learning and assessment. The first step in this process is for schools to gain insight into whether students perceive their schools as places in which they are known, supported, challenged, and inspired.

### **The *My Voice©* Student Aspirations Survey**

The *My Voice©* Student Aspirations Survey assesses student aspirations by asking students to respond to 57 statements about the 8 Conditions, as well as demographic questions. The statements probe the conditions that affect students' aspirations and, ultimately, their personal, social, physical, and academic development. Students respond to the 8 Conditions statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. By asking students how *they* perceive their school environment, *My Voice©* provides educators with

a powerful tool for understanding both what motivates and inspires students to achieve, and how well students believe their school is meeting those objectives. *My Voice*© is a critical motivator for initiating innovative, meaningful school reform.

### **My Voice© New Hampshire Grades 6-8 Report: Demographics Academic Year 2007-2008**

A total of 21,682 New Hampshire students in grades 6-8 completed the *My Voice*© survey. One Hundred sixty-eight (168) middle/junior high schools of various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds are represented. Fifty-one percent (51%) of the students surveyed were male; 49% percent were female. Thirty-one percent (31%) of students were in grade 6; 34% were in grade 7; and 35% were in grade 8.

### **My Voice© New Hampshire Grades 6-8 Report for Academic Year 2007-2008**

The *My Voice*© New Hampshire Grades 6-8 Report is organized around the 8 Conditions. In each section, the condition is defined and data on the survey statements about that condition are described. The data are reported in percentages based on the combined number of students who responded “strongly agree” or “agree” to each statement. The results are discussed in relation to key aspects of the condition. A brief conclusion and directions for further analysis are included at the end of the report.

#### **Condition 1: Belonging**

*The Condition of Belonging means that a student is a valued member of a community, while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. It is a relationship between two or more persons characterized by a sense of connection and support. Belonging is a necessary condition for students’ well-being, social engagement, and competence. The condition of Belonging increases intrinsic motivation, for it fosters self-confidence and investment in the community.*

#### **Students’ Perceptions of Belonging**

There are two key aspects to the condition of Belonging in schools. First, students must perceive school as a community where they feel connected, safe, and supported. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the students surveyed agreed with the statement “School is a welcoming and friendly place” with higher percentages of sixth (78%) than eighth (65%) graders in agreement. Thirteen percent (13%) of the students surveyed said they do not feel comfortable going to the cafeteria for lunch. Over half (57%) of all students surveyed reported they are proud of their school, though the percentages declined between sixth (67%) and eighth (46%) grade. Thirty-five percent (35%) of students surveyed agreed bullying is a problem in their school.

The second key aspect of the condition of Belonging is that students feel valued for who they are as individuals. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the students surveyed agreed with the statement “I feel accepted for who I am at school,” while 14% stated they have difficulty fitting in at school. Sixty percent (60%) of students claimed they believe teachers care about their problems and feelings, though these numbers decreased between sixth (71%) and eighth (50%) grade.

## **Discussion**

The fact that so many students in grades 6-8 do not experience school as a place where they feel a sense of connection, support and safety may surprise teachers and school leaders who work hard to create a sense of community within the school building. If we are to reverse this trend and increase the number of students who feel connected to their school, we must ask students how they would create a welcoming and supportive school environment. How can the cafeteria be re-imagined so it is a place where all students feel comfortable? How do students define bullying? If we listen to the voices of students and how they define the condition of Belonging, we may also see more positive results in the area of school pride which is felt by only just over half of the students surveyed.

Students' self-worth and connection to their teachers is another area of concern. The majority of students agree with the statement "I feel accepted for who I am at school." However, fewer students believe their teachers care about their problems and feelings. While most teachers would claim they care deeply about their students, it is critical that teachers express care in ways that are meaningful to their students.

Finally, educators must look closely at the differences between sixth and eighth graders' responses to questions about Belonging. These percentages decline between sixth and eighth grade when students are asked about school pride, whether school is a welcoming and friendly place, and whether teachers care about students' problems and feelings. What accounts for these changes?

## **Condition 2: Heroes**

*Heroes are the everyday people—teachers, friends, family—in students' lives who inspire them to excel and to make positive changes in attitudes and lifestyles. Heroes are people students can connect with, those who have a positive influence on them, and who listen to and value their ideas. Heroes build trust in others and belief in oneself. Educators are by definition Heroes to their students who look up to teachers and school leaders as people to learn from and communicate with about many things. Building relationships with students through support, guidance, and encouragement enables them to become more confident in their academic, personal, and social growth.*

### **Students' Perceptions of Heroes**

The condition of Heroes emphasizes the critical ways teachers believe in, support and inspire students. In response to *My Voice*© questions about this condition, 68% of students surveyed said they have a teacher who is a positive role model. Approximately half of the students agreed with the following statements: "Teachers care about me as an individual" (56%); Teachers care if I am absent from school (51%); and "If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk" (54%).

The condition of Heroes is also about respect, not just between teachers and students, but students and one another. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of students said students respect teachers and 41% reported students respect each other. Teachers fared better, with 72% of students agreeing with the statement "Teachers respect students."

The number of students in agreement with questions about Heroes changed significantly between sixth and eighth graders. When asked if they have a teacher who is a positive role model, 76% of sixth graders agreed while 62% of eighth graders did the same. For the statement “Teachers care about me as an individual,” 63% of sixth graders were in agreement in comparison to 51% of eighth graders. When asked if they think teachers care if they are absent from school, 60% of sixth graders agreed as opposed to 42% of eighth graders. In response to the statement “If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk,” 62% of sixth graders agreed and 47% of eighth graders did. Eighty percent (80%) of sixth graders said teachers respect students in contrast to 64% of eighth graders. Similarly, 50% of sixth graders said students respect each other whereas just 34% of eighth graders said the same. In response to “Students respect teachers” 69% of sixth graders agreed in comparison to 44% of eighth graders.

### **Discussion**

Student responses to questions about the condition of Heroes tell us important information about the ways students perceive their learning environment. First, although teachers have the potential to inspire, support and encourage students, this does not always occur in ways students recognize. While the majority of students report they have a teacher who is a role model, the fact that students have the chance to build relationships with so many teachers during a given school year suggests the percentage should be higher. In addition, the condition of Heroes is about more than being a role model. It is about being an adult whom students can trust and turn to in times of difficulty. The finding that just half of all students surveyed perceive these characteristics in their teachers reveals an area of concern for educators to address.

The second point these results emphasize is that students perceive a severe lack of respect in their schools. While the majority of students say they believe teachers respect them, the fact just over half think students respect teachers is very troubling. If teachers are in a position to inspire and support students through their learning, the challenge of doing so increases significantly if there is an essential lack of respect on either side. Most alarming, however, is that just two out of five students believes that students respect one another. Students, too, are in a position to be heroes and role models to their peers. If this trend continues, student-to-student support will be increasingly difficult to foster.

Finally, the fact that the number of students who respond positively to questions about Heroes declines between sixth and eighth grade is critical to examine in more detail. Across the board, fewer eighth graders say they have a teacher who is a positive role model; have a teacher they can talk to; and believe teachers care if they are absent. More eighth graders see respect as severely lacking between students and teachers, as well as between students and each other. These findings are worrisome and call for in-depth reflection and discussion among grade 6-8 educators.

### **Condition 3: Sense of Accomplishment**

*The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment recognizes effort, perseverance, and citizenship—along with academic achievement—as signs of student success. Educators have traditionally used a narrow view of accomplishment as it refers to innate ability, grades, or who is “best in the class.” The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment, however, views success in terms of personal growth and effort, not just class rank and test scores. Schools can celebrate their students’ accomplishments in visible ways. Taking time to recognize and support students’ efforts will result in students who are motivated to persevere through difficult tasks and to create a healthy learning environment through hard work and dedication.*

#### **Students’ Perceptions of Sense of Accomplishment**

When asked questions about traditional forms of academic accomplishment, 91% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “Getting good grades is important to me.” Eighty-one percent (81%) said tests are an important part of their education though these figures declined between sixth (86%) and eighth (75%) grade. When asked questions about their effort and perseverance, 11% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “I give up when schoolwork is difficult.” Conversely, 82% stated they put forth their best effort at school with 87% of sixth graders and 78% of eighth graders in agreement with this statement. Sixty-five percent (65%) of students surveyed said teachers recognize them when they try their best; 71% of sixth graders compared to 60% of eighth graders were in agreement.

When asked about whether accomplishments are recognized or citizenship is celebrated in their school, 18% of students reported they have never been recognized for something positive at school. Seventy-six percent (76%) stated teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful.

#### **Discussion**

Students appear to understand what schools expect of them in terms of academic achievement. Though these percentages could be higher, the majority of students report they want to get good grades and they understand the significance of testing. While most of the students surveyed want to do well in school, they are not necessarily putting forth the effort needed to achieve: one-tenth of students say they give up when they encounter difficult schoolwork and four-fifths report they try their best in school. Just three out of five say teachers recognize them when they try their best. The gap between wanting to achieve and persevering to meet goals needs to be examined, as does the role teachers play in recognizing effort and perseverance.

The data also reveals that schools need to do a better job of recognizing student accomplishments of all sorts, as well as celebrating signs of good citizenship. Schools are very good at recognizing certain types of success—high grades, athletic ability, etc. Yet all students need to be recognized for their unique talents and interests, and middle level educators need to reflect on how to create this type of an environment. The fact that almost one-fifth of students say they have never been recognized for something positive at school warrants further discussion.

## **Condition 4: Fun & Excitement**

*The condition of Fun & Excitement is characterized by students being inspired to learn. They are actively engaged and emotionally involved in their school work. Students who exhibit Fun & Excitement are self-confident, curious, and prepared; they are willing to meet the challenges of the day. To foster this condition in schools, students need to be offered new opportunities, as well as meaningful challenges, that are connected with their individual interests.*

### **Students' Perceptions of Fun & Excitement**

Fun & Excitement is first and foremost about students being engaged in their learning. To be actively engaged in learning students must find it enjoyable and worthwhile. Fifty percent (50%) of students surveyed said they enjoy being at school; more females (59%) than males (42%) agreed with this statement. Of the students surveyed, 62% said they enjoy participating in their classes; 64% agreed with the statement "Learning can be fun"; and 41% agreed with the statement "School is boring." More males (49%) than females (32%) said school is boring and more females (69%) than males (59%) said learning can be fun.

The condition of Fun & Excitement is in part determined by a teacher's willingness to foster this condition. However, students do not perceive teachers as especially engaged in the learning process. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of students agreed with the statement "Teachers enjoy working with students," while just 43% agreed "Teachers make school an exciting place to learn." Supporting these findings, 50% of students agreed with the statement "Teachers have fun at school."

The number of students in agreement with questions about Fun & Excitement changed significantly between sixth and eighth grade. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of sixth graders and 44% of eighth graders said they enjoy being at school. In response to statements about teachers, 77% of sixth and 61% of eighth graders said teachers enjoy working with students; 57% of sixth and 32% of eighth graders agreed teachers make school an exciting place to learn; and 59% of sixth and 42% of eighth graders agreed teachers have fun at school. Thirty-two percent (32%) of sixth graders, in contrast to 49% of eighth graders, agreed with the statement "School is boring," and 71% of sixth graders as opposed to 54% of eighth graders agreed they enjoy participating in classes. Finally, 70% of sixth and 58% of eighth graders agreed learning can be fun.

### **Discussion**

The most positive finding in this condition is the percentage of students who believe learning can be fun. Though this figure could certainly be higher, its significance is clear when contrasted with the high number of students who are bored in school and the low number who enjoy their classes. The disparity between the number of students who believe learning can be fun and those who do not experience engagement in their school must be addressed; students are the potential, not the problem. Middle level educators must explore more effective ways of tapping into that potential for engaged learning. The differences between male and female responses are also important to examine.

Students' perceptions of their teachers' engagement in the learning process are also interesting. Many students do not see their teachers as individuals who enjoy their work in the classroom or with students. Whether this is true or not, the fact that these percentages are low indicates an area of professional concern for all educators. Finally, the number of students who respond positively to questions about Fun & Excitement declines between sixth and eighth grade. Fewer eighth graders say they enjoy being in school, and more say school is boring. Fewer eighth graders say learning can be fun and fewer believe teachers make school an exciting place to learn. This significant decline as students move through grades 6-8 suggests a crisis in engaged learning that needs to be addressed.

The condition of Fun & Excitement in schools is not about students laughing and playing instead of studying and learning. It is about students becoming so engaged in what they are learning they stop watching the clock and looking out the window. These findings lead us to ask: How can schools foster this condition throughout the curriculum?

### **Condition 5: Curiosity & Creativity**

*The condition of Curiosity & Creativity is characterized by inquisitiveness, eagerness, a strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and a longing to satisfy the mind with new discoveries. Curiosity triggers students to ask "Why?" while creativity gives them the initiative to ask "Why Not?" The intensity of Curiosity & Creativity tends to diminish over time due to the habituating effects of the environment. Therefore, to sustain student motivation, schools must pay careful attention to creating learning environments that promote questioning and creative exploration.*

#### **Students' Perceptions of Curiosity & Creativity**

The condition of Curiosity & Creativity encourages students to experience the joy of exploring new ideas. When asked about their current learning, 73% of students surveyed stated they enjoy learning new things; 78% of sixth graders compared to 69% of eighth graders agreed with this statement. Sixty-nine percent (69%) said they learn new things that are interesting to them at school. This number was higher for sixth graders (77%) than for eighth graders (61%).

To foster Curiosity & Creativity, classrooms must encourage student inquisitiveness and demonstrate the relevance of studying new material. Questions about Curiosity & Creativity in the classroom yielded mixed results. Seventy percent (70%) of students agreed with the statement "I feel comfortable asking questions in class." Eighty-one percent (81%) of students surveyed agreed with the statement "My teachers present lessons in different ways"; 71% agreed with the statement "At school I am encouraged to be creative," though the percentage decreased between sixth (77%) and eighth (65%) grade. Just 47% of students stated their classes help them understand what is happening in their everyday lives, though this number was higher for sixth (53%) than for eighth graders (42%). Eighty-two percent (82%) of students agreed with the statement "What I learn in school will benefit my future."

## **Discussion**

Questions about the condition of Curiosity & Creativity revealed that approximately three out of four students surveyed like to learn new things and a similarly high number say they learn new things that are interesting to them in school. While these numbers can be improved, they suggest an alignment between students' hopes for school and the reality they encounter. Of concern is the fact that percentages decrease between sixth and eighth grade.

In addition, students must be engaged enough in their learning to ask "why?" and "why not?" questions. Yet three out of ten students do not feel comfortable asking questions in class. To foster Curiosity & Creativity students must also have the chance to be creative while they are learning. Ways to improve on the percentages in these areas should be discussed.

In terms of relevance, less than half of all students say they see the connection between their current learning and their everyday lives. For students to maintain an active interest in learning, they must see the value in it. They must be able to connect what they are studying to their world in some tangible way that leads them to ask questions and seek answers. If we do not make learning relevant, we are failing our students no matter how many new ideas they are exposed to in a given school year.

Interestingly, four out of five students believe what they learn in school is going to be helpful to them in the future. What does it mean that our students do not see school as relevant to their current lives, but do think it is meaningful for their future? How do we narrow this gap to ensure learning is relevant in the present?

## **Condition 6: Spirit of Adventure**

*The condition of Spirit of Adventure is characterized by students' ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and home, with family and friends. Students experience the Spirit of Adventure when they tackle something new without the fear of failure or success. When schools promote healthy decision making and healthy risk taking, their students become more confident and resilient. Students with the Spirit of Adventure see life as full of opportunities worth exploring for their own sake.*

### **Students' Perceptions of Spirit of Adventure**

The condition of Spirit of Adventure is about students trying new things. It is about students moving from their comfort zone to their challenge zone. Students face two common obstacles when they do so: the fear of success and the fear of failure. While 82% of students surveyed said they push themselves to do better academically, 22% reported they are afraid to try something if they think they may fail. In terms of anxiety around success, 5% of students surveyed agreed with the statement "I am afraid my friends won't like me if I do well in school."

Another key aspect of Spirit of Adventure is whether students feel supported when they want to try new things. Support can come in many forms, including teachers and other students. Seventy percent (70%) of students surveyed believe teachers help them learn

from their mistakes, with 79% of sixth graders and 62% of eighth graders agreeing. Seventy-six percent (76%) said teachers think they can be successful. Peers fared less well: 47% of the students surveyed stated students are supportive of each other, though these percentages were higher for sixth graders (54%) than eighth graders (41%). Sixty-four percent (64%) reported they are excited to tell their friends when they get good grades. More sixth graders (68%) than eighth graders (59%) were excited to share good grades with their friends as are more females (71%) than males (58%).

### **Discussion**

Whether students have the courage to move beyond their comfort zone into their challenge zone depends on overcoming fear and anxiety. As the data shows, close to one-quarter of students are reluctant to challenge themselves because they are afraid they might fail. This significant figure should be of concern to every educator. For if students are not willing to challenge themselves—academically, socially, personally—they will not learn and grow as individuals. It must be as safe for students to have a Spirit of Adventure and *not* succeed as it is for them *to* succeed when they take a healthy risk.

Less obvious, though no less worrisome, are the students who are afraid to challenge themselves because they might *succeed*. For these students, having a Spirit of Adventure means potentially threatening their social network—their sense of Belonging—and is therefore a powerful deterrent to success. The fact that just three out of five students surveyed are excited to tell their friends when they get good grades underscores this point. If all students are to reach their highest potential, schools must find ways to make it safe for all students to take on personal challenges and succeed at them.

Finally, the fact that less than three-fourths of all students believe teachers help them learn from their mistakes suggests students who try something new, and fail, need more sustained support so they do not give up. Middle level educators must also explore how students can be encouraged to support each other's healthy risk taking so that all students embrace new ideas and challenges throughout their education.

### **Condition 7: Leadership & Responsibility**

*The condition of Leadership & Responsibility means students are able to express their ideas and are willing to accept consequences for their actions. It cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community. Schools which promote this condition teach and expect their students to be good decision makers. They provide legitimate decision-making opportunities, seek student input, and expect students to be accountable for their actions and words. Students are trusted to make the right decisions and are recognized for doing so.*

#### **Students' Perceptions of Leadership & Responsibility**

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility is twofold: students must develop strong decision-making skills and have real leadership opportunities. Only then can they be truly responsible leaders who make a difference in their communities. When asked about decision making, 73% of students surveyed reported that they think about others' feelings when they make decisions; more females (79%) than males (67%) agreed with the

statement. Sixty-four percent (64%) said they are good decision makers. Seventy-one percent (71%) of students also stated teachers encourage students to make decisions; 76% of sixth graders and 66% of eighth graders were in agreement.

When asked about leadership in their school communities, just 45% of students reported they know the goals their school is working on; 49% of sixth graders agreed and 40% of eighth graders did. Forty-four percent (44%) stated student council represents all students at school; greater numbers of sixth graders (50%) than eighth graders (38%) agreed with this statement. When asked questions about themselves as leaders, 54% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “I see myself as a leader.” Only 31% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “Other students see me as a leader.”

### **Discussion**

The findings in this condition reveal that although the majority of students see themselves as leaders and good decision makers, this self-perception does not necessarily translate into leadership opportunities and actions: only a third of students surveyed believe *other students* see them as leaders. For the condition of Leadership & Responsibility to thrive students cannot just think of themselves as leaders--they must learn to be leaders in their communities, beginning with their school.

It is important to note that seven out of ten students believe teachers encourage students to be decision makers, suggesting that the leadership opportunities available in classrooms might be a good starting point for school-wide initiatives. Such initiatives may improve the findings that less than half of the students say they are aware of the goals their school community is working on and two-fifths say student council is representative of the student body.

### **Condition 8: Confidence to Take Action**

*Confidence to Take Action is the extent to which students believe in themselves. It encourages them to dream about their future while being motivated to set goals in the present. This condition is what educators strive for; all other conditions must be established and supported for students to attain this level of aspiration. Confidence to Take Action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life and by looking inward rather than outward for approval. Schools can help build their students' Confidence to Take Action by providing support, celebrating diversity, and encouraging independent thinking.*

#### **Students' Perceptions of Confidence to Take Action**

The condition of Confidence to Take Action is the pinnacle of the 8 Condition framework and also the goal of all educational ventures: to provide students with enough belief in themselves that they can set goals for the future and take steps in the present to reach those goals. When asked questions about goal-setting, 78% of students surveyed reported they think it is important to set high goals; 87% said they work hard to reach their goals.

The ability to set and reach for goals is directly connected to a positive view of one's future. Ninety-two percent (92%) of students surveyed agreed with the statement “I

believe I can be successful.” In contrast, 80% of students believed teachers expect them to be successful. Seventy-nine percent (79%) said they are excited about their future, yet just 59% agreed “I believe I can make a difference in this world.”

Finally, when asked about the connection between school and their future, 89% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “Going to college is important for my future,” while just 74% said their current schooling is preparing them well for the future. More sixth graders (80%) than eighth graders (68%) agreed school is preparing them well for their future.

### **Discussion**

There is a difference between dreaming about the future and taking the steps needed to reach those dreams. The condition of Confidence to Take Action is defined by the successful integration of these two processes and the majority of students surveyed appear to know it is important both to set high goals *and* work hard to reach them. Yet almost a quarter of the students surveyed do not see goal setting as important.

Other troubling questions that arise from the data include: Why do so few students see their present schooling as relevant, in particular when compared to the higher percentage who see going to college as relevant? What does this tell us about students’ understanding of the steps it takes to reach the goal of attending college? The fact that four out of five students believe teachers expect them to be successful is a positive finding. Teachers play a key role in helping students believe in themselves and their abilities to reach their goals. How can middle level educators sustain and even improve on this finding?

Finally, while nine out of ten students think they can be successful, only just over half believe they can make a difference in the world. How do schools foster students’ belief not only in their ability to succeed, but in their ability to be engaged citizens who contribute to the world around them?

### **Conclusion**

The *My Voice*© New Hampshire Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2007-2008 reveals both positive and negative findings around each of the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference®. While schools should be proud of their accomplishments, there is clearly much work to be done to improve even the most positive of these findings.

The 8 Conditions that support student learning and growth—*Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action*—need to be in place if schools are to foster students’ ability to set and reach their goals. Yet, as the survey findings reveal, these conditions are neither fully nor deeply integrated into the schools. If schools are to be places in which teaching and learning thrive, this must change. Listening to the voices of students is the first step.

### **Directions for Further Analysis**

The *My Voice*© New Hampshire Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2007-2008 provides an initial snapshot of how middle level students perceive themselves and their learning environments. However, more comprehensive analyses are needed to understand fully the implications of the data. For example, the findings must be viewed through lenses such as racial/ethnic difference and school difference: rural vs. urban, small vs. large, academically successful vs. academically struggling. Differences between sixth and eighth graders are important to examine more closely. Additional factors such as how the schools are configured (i.e. k-6, 6-8, 7-8 etc) need to be explored.

As educators dedicated to positive reform in today's schools, it is our responsibility to explore in-depth the *My Voice*© data so we can fully understand and appreciate how students perceive their learning environments. In doing so, we will gain insight into students' fears, frustrations, hopes and dreams. Only then can we take the next steps toward our goal of improving teaching and learning environments so all schools promote students' self-worth, active engagement in the learning process, and a sense of purpose for all students.

## My Voice® Student Aspirations Survey Questions & Grades 6-8 Results Academic Year 2007-2008

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Survey Statement</i>	<i>Total in Agreement</i>
<i>Belonging</i>	School is a welcoming and friendly place.	71%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel accepted for who I am at school.	79%
<i>Belonging</i>	I have difficulty fitting in at school.	14%
<i>Belonging</i>	Teachers care about my problems and feelings.	60%
<i>Belonging</i>	I am proud of my school.	57%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel comfortable going to the cafeteria for lunch.	87%
<i>Belonging</i>	I think bullying is a problem in my school.	35%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect teachers.	57%
<i>Heroes</i>	I have a teacher who is a positive role model for me.	68%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers care about me as an individual.	56%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers care if I am absent from school.	51%
<i>Heroes</i>	If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk.	54%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers respect students.	72%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect each other.	41%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Tests are an important part of my education.	81%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful.	76%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I have never been recognized for something positive at school.	18%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I give up when schoolwork is difficult.	11%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Teachers recognize me when I try my best.	65%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I put forth my best effort at school.	82%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Getting good grades is important to me.	91%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	I enjoy being at school.	50%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	Teachers enjoy working with students.	69%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	Teachers make school an exciting place to learn.	43%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	School is boring.	41%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	I enjoy participating in my classes.	62%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	Teachers have fun at school.	50%
<i>Fun &amp; Excitement</i>	Learning can be fun.	64%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	70%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	My teachers present lessons in different ways.	81%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	At school I am encouraged to be creative.	71%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	My classes help me understand what is happening in my everyday life.	47%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	I enjoy learning new things.	73%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	I learn new things that are interesting to me at school.	69%
<i>Curiosity &amp; Creativity</i>	What I learn in school will benefit my future.	82%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am afraid my friends won't like me if I do well in school.	5%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I push myself to do better academically.	82%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Students are supportive of each other.	47%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am afraid to try something if I think I may fail.	22%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Teachers help me learn from my mistakes.	70%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Teachers think I can be successful.	76%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades.	64%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	Student council represents all students at school.	44%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	I see myself as a leader.	54%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	Other students see me as a leader.	31%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	Teachers encourage students to make decisions.	71%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	I think about others' feelings when I make decisions.	73%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	I am a good decision maker.	64%
<i>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</i>	I know the goals my school is working on this year.	45%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I believe I can be successful.	92%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I believe I can make a difference in this world.	59%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	Teachers expect me to be successful.	80%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	Going to college is important to my future.	89%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I work hard to reach my goals.	87%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I am excited about my future.	79%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I think it is important to set high goals.	78%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	School is preparing me well for my future.	74%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents care about my education	97%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents like my school	71%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents think going to college is important	91%

<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents feel comfortable talking to my teachers	76%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	Teachers let me parents know what I do well	60%
<b><i>The Role of Parents</i></b>	I would like my parents to attend more school events	35%